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Letter dated 13 January 2017 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit to you a letter dated 11 January 2017 from the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Matthew **Rycroft**

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Annex to the letter dated 13 January 2017 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

On behalf of the High Negotiations Committee, and as requested by the General Coordinator of the Committee, Riad Hijab, it is my honour to transmit to you a letter dated 11 January 2017 from Mr. Hijab (see enclosure). In his letter, Mr. Hijab discusses the dire situation in Wadi Barada.

(*Signed*) Najib **Ghadbian**
Special Representative of the Syrian National Coalition
to the United Nations

Enclosure

[Original: Arabic]

We write to you to call upon the United Nations and its Member States to immediately address the alarming and deteriorating situation in Wadi Barada; to condemn the atrocities being perpetrated by Bashar Al-Assad and Iranian-backed militias operating in the Wadi Barada region; to demand an immediate cessation of indiscriminate attacks against civilians and major violations of human rights and international humanitarian law; and to require full and immediate compliance with the terms of the ceasefire that the regime claims entered into force on 29 December 2016.

Since 29 December 2016, in flagrant violation of the ceasefire that theoretically went into effect at that time, the regime and its allies have committed more than 399 violations that have resulted in at least 271 deaths. The worst of those violations have been committed against the inhabitants of Wadi Barada west of Damascus, whom the regime and Iranian-supported militias have subjected to a merciless barrage of attacks that have actually increased in intensity since the supposed entry into force of the ceasefire. In particular, the regime's air force has subjected Ayn al-Fijah spring and the villages of Basimah, Kafr Zayt and Husayniyah to unrelenting and inhumane daily bombardment that includes barrel bombs — which are by their very nature indiscriminate — in a shameless violation of well-established international humanitarian law. We also fear that the regime and its allies will continue their long-established practice of deliberately targeting the region's vital infrastructure. We are especially horrified by reports that regime forces fired four rockets containing toxic chlorine gas at the village of Basimah in Wadi Barada on Thursday, 5 January 2017, in flagrant violation of the Syrian regime's obligations as a signatory to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Wadi Barada has a population of over 100,000 people. Every one of them is suffering as a result of the intensified bombing and unprecedented shortages of the basic necessities of human life, including food, water, electricity and medicine. The regime has been conducting a submit-or-starve campaign against Wadi Barada since the middle of 2015, and is using the ceasefire as a cover to continue implementing that brutal policy. During the first three days of the supposed ceasefire alone, the regime's barbaric operations displaced some 1,200 individuals, and the humanitarian situation of those who remain is deteriorating with every passing hour.

The ceasefire violations go beyond atrocities involving the bombing of civilians, and include air strikes targeting the basic necessities of human life. The regime and its allies are responsible for destroying the Ayn al-Fijah water pump in Wadi Barada, thereby cutting off access to water resources for some 5.5 million people. This poses a grave threat to human life, in particular for vulnerable children who face the nightmarish spectre of increased risk of exposure to water-borne illnesses as they are forced to use alternative unregulated water sources. The deliberate bombing of Ayn al-Fijah's water supply constitutes a major war crime, and the regime must be held accountable for this serious violation of international law.

We stress that as long as the Syrian regime and its allies continue their brutal and violent policies, the ceasefire agreement will continue to hang by a thread. The

regime's abject refusal to abide by the conditions of the truce is undermining the foundations of that agreement, and will leave in its wake the dust of yet another failed ceasefire.

We therefore call upon the United Nations Security Council to put an immediate end to these serious violations of international law and call to account the perpetrators. We ask you not to allow this brazen behaviour to send yet another ceasefire agreement to its grave, and instead take immediate action to bring new and unprecedented hope to the Syrian people for a meaningful path to a peaceful solution. We also call on the United Nations to support efforts to uncover the facts in Wadi Barada, with a view to ascertaining responsibility for violations of international law perpetrated against civilians. The spirit of justice in Syria should be guided not by impunity, but rather by accountability and the rule of law. We further ask for immediate attention to the water crisis that is affecting millions of people. The spread of disease and suffering caused by that crisis must be stopped immediately, including by ensuring access for humanitarian assistance as called for in Security Council resolution 2254 (2015).

As always, we keep our gaze firmly fixed on the needs of the Syrian people and the immense difficulties before us. We reiterate our commitment to achieving a political solution to the Syrian conflict and ensuring respect for the inviolable norms of human rights and international humanitarian law in Syria. We look forward to your cooperation and assistance in reaching, at long last, an end to this violent conflict.

(*Signed*) Riad **Hijab**
General Coordinator
High Negotiations Committee of the Syrian Revolutionary
and Opposition Forces